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ABSTRACT

The survival of Ethiopia as a religious and national unit is investigated through inquiry. Intended as a learning experience for students of African history, the paper provides information on Ethiopia's past, its present status, and on the choice the nation faces between modernity and tradition. A calendar of religious and political events in Ethiopia and a summary of the legend of Solomon and Sheba are presented as background. Eight question-answer sequences involving the development of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, legends, military and political history, and religious conflicts are presented. An enrichment activity is described which asks students to make value judgments about recent developments in the Ethiopian Church. A bibliography is included. (Author/DB)

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ETHIOPIA - PROBLEMS OF RELIGIOUS AND NATIONAL UNITY

THE LEGEND OF SOLOMON AND SHEBA

In 980 B.C. the Queen of Sheba ruled over northern Ethiopia from her capital at Axum. There she dwelt in a great palace and worshipped the Sun. Makeda heard of the wisdom of King Solomon and led a great expedition to his court to discover his wisdom first-hand. After spending several months at the court in Jerusalem, observing his ways and marvelling at his achievements, she expressed the desire to return to her kingdom and put into practice what she had learned from Solomon.

Solomon admired her intelligence and beauty and wanted a child by her. Without wishing to take her by force, he designed a way to fulfill his desire. He prepared a grand farewell feast for her ordering his servants to put extra spices into her food so that she would thirst greatly. After the feast he invited her to spend the night at the palace. Makeda consented on condition that he would not take her by force. Solomon so promised and in return made her promise not to take anything from his palace. In the night while Solomon and Sheba slept on opposite sides of the royal bed-chamber, she awoke thirsty. Believing Solomon to be asleep, she drank from a large cup of water Solomon had deliberately placed at her side. Solomon awoke, accusing her of violating her oath. Sheba thereby released him from his oath; thus Solomon worked his will on her.

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Nine months later Sheba had a son by Solomon whom she named Ebna Hakim ("son of the wise"). When he came of age she sent him to Solomon. After several months he returned to his kingdom bringing with him the Holy Ark of the Covenant in order to strengthen the new worship of Judaism which Makeda had introduced into her kingdom. Ebna Hakim assumed the throne as Menelik I, establishing the Solomonic Dynasty of the Ethiopian emperors which has lasted more than three thousand years. (Haile Selassie, the charismatic but conservative monarch, was deposed in 1974 after ruling for 44 years. The future of the Solomonic Dynasty and Ethiopia are now uncertain.)

ETHIOPIA - PROBLEMS OF RELIGIOUS AND NATIONAL UNITY

Calendar of Events

Holidays

Inkutatash	New Year's Day	September 11*
Maskel	Celebration of St. Helena's finding of the True Cross	September 27
Yezewd Ba'al	Anniversary of the Coronation of the Emperor	November 2
Genna	Christmas	January 7
Timkat	Epiphany	January 19
Battle of Adowa	Patriot's Day	March 2
Good Friday	Crucifixion of Christ	April 16)
Easter)	The end of Lent	April 18) vary
Easter Monday)		April 19)
	Liberation Day (Haile Selassie returned from exile in 1941)	May 5
Haile Selassie Day	The Emperor's Birthday	July 23**

Genna (Christmas) is fixed.

*All other dates vary from year to year.
**No longer a holiday.

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ETHIOPIA - PROBLEMS OF RELIGIOUS AND NATIONAL UNITY

WILL ETHIOPIA SURVIVE?

Holidays often reflect a country's history. The Fourth of July and Christmas are important holidays in the United States. For Ethiopia the calendar identifies events which have shaped its development as Africa's oldest continuously independent nation. Coupled with the tale of Solomon and Sheba which explains how the dynasty which ruled Ethiopia for more than 3000 years came to be, the Ethiopian calendar is a novel and different way for students to open the door to the evolution of present day Ethiopia. Today Ethiopia faces the challenge of choosing between modernity and tradition and the resolution of the problems which confront her may well determine the final choice.

Read the legend of Solomon and Sheba attached as well as the calendar of events.

Coptic Christianity came to Ethiopia from Egypt in the 14th century A.D. What factors account for Christianity's survival?

- Ethiopia was isolated behind what is now the Eritrean coast. Trade and commerce with the outside world, later largely converted to Islam, was almost non-existent. Ethiopia is mountainous. This also limited contact. The Ethiopian Church was free - from the 7th to the 14th century - to establish itself. The missionary zeal was very great.

How do we know that the Ethiopian Church is patterned after the Orthodox churches of the East rather than the Catholic church of the West?

- Major holidays are religious and reflect Eastern Christianity. Christmas coincides with our Epiphany. (In 1975 the new government included some Moslem holidays)

How does Christianity in Ethiopia differ from Western Christianity?

- A Patriarch instead of a "Pope"; he is at Addis Ababa. Presence of Patriarch rather than the Pope verifies Orthodox rather than (Catholic) Christianity as practiced in the West. Ethiopians use Julian rather than Gregorian calendar (12 months; 30 days; 5 days at the end; 6 for leap year); Cyrillic rather than Roman alphabet; Ge'ez is the language of worship. (continues..)

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(continued...)

- Beliefs: unlike some Protestant religions here, they believe Christ is both God and Man; their Holy Scriptures contain books which our bibles do not.

Why are other religiors also present?

- Geographical proximity to the Moslem world explains important Islamic influences. Jewish traders established a small community (Felashas) which still survives. African religions also exist.

How might religious conflicts arise?
Where might they find expression?

- Established church tends to generate resistance by those espousing other faiths. Moslem influence in Eritrea figures in resistance to federation within Ethiopia.

Menelik I, the reputed son of Solomon who established the dynasty is a legendary figure. Do you believe the legend? Why? Why not?

- Yes! Legends have emotional and spiritual appeal. Legends are often based on real events.
- No! It was the ruler's way of legitimizing his power.

Ethiopia is located, along with Somalia, on the "Horn of Africa". Italy conquered Eritrea, Ethiopia's northernmost province, in the 1880's. Ethiopia established a federation with Eritrea in 1952 and full union occurred in 1962. What evidence is there that Eritrea finds this union less than satisfactory? Why does the Ethiopian government wish to continue it?

- War of liberation, begun in 1962, persists. Guerrilla liberation activities include the Eritrean Liberation Front and the Popular Liberation Front. Eritreans led an abortive coup in 1960. Union gives Ethiopia access to the sea.

A military junta/council deposed the conservative regime of Selassie in 1974 after a 44-year rule. What problems confront this newly established government?

- The resolution of the conflict with secessionists in Eritrea. Drought and attendant famine due to inadequate rainfall. Establishment of schools and improved literacy. Organization of social services.

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ENRICHMENT

The indigenous Christian Church of Egypt is known as the Coptic Church. The Ethiopian Church was originally a Coptic church evolving from the Coptic church of Egypt. Haile Salassie broke all ties. Now it is truly an independent church. Is this good or bad? For Ethiopia? For the Church?

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